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Socialist Studies No.8

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The Knox-Maxton Affair

(How James Maxton M.P., lifelong member of the Independent Labour Party and opponent of the Socialist Party of Great Britain was, in 1987, dressed up afresh by the Clapham-based Socialist Party to appear as “*the personification of Socialism*”).

The Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.)

The I.L.P., formed in 1983, had established a dominating influence over the Labour Party at the time of the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929-31. Two-thirds of the Labour MP's were members of the I.L.P., including Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and many other Ministers.

The I.L.P. was a reformist organisation aiming to establish state capitalism (Nationalisation). It claimed to be socialist but what it meant by socialism was set out in its pamphlet “SOCIALISM AT WORK IN QUEENSLAND”. This described the actions of the Labour Government in Queensland in taking over sugar mills, cattle farms, butcher shops, etc. The pamphlet contained this statement:

“*Workers of Great Britain and Ireland, the policy of the I.L.P. is identically the same as the policy of Ryan's Socialist Government of Queensland. And what has been done in Queensland can be done in Great Britain and Ireland*”.

The I.L.P. helped to form the Labour party and was affiliated to it until 1932. It disaffiliated in that year over the issue of the right of I.L.P. members of Parliament to be allowed, on occasion, to vote against Labour Party policies. In 1946 it applied, unsuccessfully, to re-affiliate. At the 1959 general election no I.L.P. candidate was elected. Its membership had dwindled and most of its remaining members joined the Labour Party.

Maxton was a member of the I.L.P. from 1922 until his death in 1946 and served as its chairman for many years.

THE S.P.G.B. versus MAXTON and the I.L.P.

For as long as the S.P.G.B. was under the control of socialists its attitude to the I.L.P. and to Maxton was one of outright opposition.

The S.P.G.B. Manifesto, 1905, after reviewing the compromising political actions of the I.L.P. summed up as follows:

“*The so-called Independent Labour Party is independent in that it is free to sell itself to the highest bidder. The I.L.P. is in reality, run by a set of job-hunters whose only apparent political principle is to catch votes on various pretexts and by still more varying means. They openly repudiate the class struggle...*”.

The SOCIALIST STANDARD (September 1931) quoted the admission of the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P.: “*that to wage a Socialist fight against the poverty of the working class is made more difficult when a labour government is in power than at other times*”.

The October 1931 issue quoted Maxton’s absurd anti-Marxist statement that capitalism was about to collapse, within six months certainly, but perhaps within a month.

In the SOCIALIST STANDARD of March 1931, Maxton’s reformist case for “*the living wage*” was analysed from the Socialist standpoint.

In May 1928 Maxton debated with the S.P.G.B. on the question: “*Which Party should the working class support, the I.L.P. or the S.P.G.B.*” (Reported in the SOCIALIST STANDARD, June 1928).

In the debate, Maxton, who was at that time Chairman of the I.L.P., told our representative, J. Fitzgerald that we ought to join the Labour Party.

When the Attlee Labour Government came to power in 1945 Maxton stated:- “*The I.L.P. would help in every way to make the Labour Government a success*”.

“*Maxton especially welcomed the nationalisation of the Bank of England*” (Knox’s Life of Maxton, page 145).

THE NEW LINE ON MAXTON

In 1987 a life of Maxton was published with the title “*James Maxton*”. It was written by William Knox, a member of the S.P.G.B. It was reviewed in the SOCIALIST STANDARD for July 1988.

In his book Knox admitted) page 60 that Maxton “*failed to either accept or understand Marx’s Materialist explanation of historical development*”, and (page 150): “*Maxton found...that there was no middle way between the Labour Party and the C.P.G.B. (Communist Party of Great Britain)*”.

In spite of this, Knox’s book claimed (page 1) that Maxton: “*made more socialists than any other comparable figure in Britain*” and claimed for Maxton: “*For the next twenty-five years (1922-1946) he was the personification of British Left-wing Socialism*”.

And this (page 150):-

“*...his oratory and challenging idealism influenced thousands of young people to become Socialists and instilled in them a vision of Socialist society which transcended the narrow unimaginative doctrines of Stalinism and State Capitalism*”.

These “*thousands of young people*” were of course recruits to the I.L.P. and Labour party, not the S.P.G.B. In the SOCIALIST STANDARD for July 1977 was an article entitled: “*The Labour Party is and never has been a Socialist Party*” It was by W. Knox.

Knox’s LIFE OF JAMES MAXTON was presented as one of a series of “*original biographies of leading figures...in the...socialist and labour movement*”.

Certainly, in one respect it was “*original*” for it deliberately excluded one section of Maxton’s political career, his opposition to Socialism and the S.P.G.B.

The book referred to nearly a score of political organisations including the S.D.F., the S.L.P., The socialist league and the communist Party of Great Britain –but not to the S.P.G.B., which as far as the book is concerned, did not exist.

Needless to say Knox omitted to mention Maxton's debate with the S.P.G.B., and although it referred by name to various people it described as Socialists it never said a word about the Socialists in the S.P.G.B. Of course Knox remained silent on the fact that he was a member of the S.P.G.B.

Knox's book did find space to say of Maxton that "*he was a romantic, a powerful orator, and a strikingly handsome man*".

Refusal of the Executive Committee to take action against Knox

It is obvious that W. Knox's book on Maxton failed to meet the obligations going with membership of the Party and to state the Party case; both in representing Maxton as a Socialist and in concealing the existence of the S.P.G.B.

At its meeting on 10th May 1988 the E.C. of the Clapham-based Socialist party held that: "*there are no grounds for taking disciplinary action against Comrade Knox*".

It excused its failure to take action on the specious ground that: "*Camden's case against Comrade Knox appears to be based more on the sentiments expressed in his subsequent letters which the E.C. considers to be the result of overreaction to the Branch's largely unwarranted assertions*".

This has its humorous aspect. The E.C. affected to believe that Camden's criticisms, which were written in 1987 and 1988 after the book was published caused Knox to overreact in 1986 when he wrote the book; that is to say he overreacted to events which had not happened until a year or two later.

And the E.C. did not show in what way Camden's criticisms of the book were "*largely unwarranted*".

We cannot help wondering if the E.C. members really did believe what their resolution said. (Knox resigned from the Party shortly after the E.C. had declined to charge him).

OBITUARY

Our Comrade Laurie Frank died just before Christmas at the age of 79 years.

He joined the S.P.G.B. in 1938 on his arrival in this country from Austria. His late father, Rudolph Frank, a Sudeten German, was a member of the S.P.G.B.; he joined around 1908. Later he returned to Vienna and formed the Austrian Group.

In 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War Laurie, in common with other members, became a conscientious objector and was directed to work on the land. There he met up with a number of S.P.G.B.'ers in similar circumstances; Arthur George, Clifford Winnie, George East, George Sword, Clifford Groves and some other names beyond recall. Luckily the farm was just outside London thus enabling these comrades to live at home and carry on Party work without interruption.

During the war Laurie was elected by the membership to the post of national Literature Secretary; a post he held for many years. He was responsible for the distribution of the SOCIALIST STANDARD and Party pamphlets, nationally and internationally. The circulation of the SOCIALIST STANDARD then was over 5,000 copies per month. He was elected a Party auditor.

Old members recall him as a permanent fixture at our various Head Offices; first Great Dover Street, then Gloucester Place, Rugby Chambers and latterly Clapham High Street. When the post of National Literature Secretary was replaced by the Central Literature Distribution Committee, he was elected Central Branch secretary, literally a full time job. All communication was by post; every member of central branch had to have every Executive committee Minute, Conference Agendas, voting papers and practically every circular from every source. This exhausting and

demanding work was done behind the scenes –no glamour, no publicity, just thoroughness and efficiency.

In the early 1960's his health began to fail, he lost his sight in 1970 and later one of his limbs. Despite being diabetic, blind and crippled he refused to give up and with the help of his wife Pat (not a Party member) he carried on until 10 years before his death when he was no longer physically capable. Thereafter his Party activity was limited to regularly attending the Camden/Bloomsbury branch.

It is no exaggeration to say that Laurie spent his entire adult life in the service of the socialist movement, to the detriment of his health and social life. He takes his place alongside those dedicated pioneers whom we honour and whose perseverance, courage and integrity kept the principles of the S.P.G.B. alive and unsullied.

That such a man as Laurie –who gave 52 years of unstinting service to the Socialist Party –should have been falsely accused towards the end of his life of “*undemocratic behaviour*” and action detrimental to the Party’s interests and summarily expelled with others was a ruthless unspeakable act carried out by ignorant zealots of the self-styled Socialist Party at Clapham. Such savage injustice will not be forgotten or forgiven by fair-minded decent people whom the success of our movement will depend.

We offer our condolences to Laurie’s wife Pat and to his brother Jerry.

REVOLUTIONARY LITIGENTS?

The following appeared in the Executive Committee (E.C) Report of the Clapham based Socialist Party for the meeting held in December 1992, item 14:

“the acting General secretary reported that a group of ex-members had opened a bank account in our name and were appealing for funds on the basis that they were us”.

This is a reference to the S.P.G.B. (us). In plain words we are accused of obtaining money under false pretences and that we have opened a bank account to facilitate this purpose. The E.C. decided on the basis of this report to seek legal advice. Their legal adviser if he knows his job will tell them that this allegation amounts to criminal libel.

This latest episode is part of the Socialist Party’s campaign to close us down. Unable to do so by force of argument they hope to use the legal process and the courts to do their dirty work.

In the meantime, if any persons have sent us money in the mistaken belief that they are connected in any way with The Socialist Party of 52 Clapham High Street we shall be pleased to refund their money on request by return of post.

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Book Review: Waiting for Capitalism to Collapse

It would be difficult to exaggerate the harm done to the Socialist movement by those who encourage the workers to sit back and wait for capitalism to collapse.

They were in full cry during the depression of the 1930's. There was James Maxton MP, of the Independent Labour Party who, in August 1931, said that capitalism: “*is now at the stage of final collapse*” and could last only a few months. And the Communist, Palme Dutt, who declared in October of the same year: “*the crisis marches on relentlessly*” – “*the whole system is faced with collapse*”. Three years earlier the Communist, E. Varga had written in his book “THE DECLINE OF CAPITALISM”: “*It is no longer a ‘dying’ capitalism but one already in the process of mortification*”.

The most harmful of the various groups was not Maxton, who knew nothing of theory and was simply reacting emotionally to the spectacle of millions of workers unemployed, but people who produce elaborate theories claiming to prove that the collapse is bound to happen. The publication of a new edition of THE LAW OF ACCUMULATION AND BREAKDOWN OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM by Henryk Grossmann (Pluto Press 210 pages) illustrates the point.

Grossmann, whose book first appeared in 1929, held, as did Rosa Luxemburg, that in capitalist society demand does not increase fast enough to absorb the mounting production of commodities and that Marx failed to develop this conception.

Mr. Tony Kennedy, “*a frequent contributor to Living Marxism*”, provides a Foreword and an introduction to Grossmann’s book:-

“He aimed to show that the essence of Marx’s analysis of capitalist society was the identification of the inexorable tendency towards breakdown as the fundamental characteristic of the social system as a whole”.

He quotes Grossmann as follows:

“The question I shall examine is whether fully developed capitalism...contains the capacity to develop the process of reproduction indefinitely and on a continuing expanding basis or whether the process of expansion runs into limits of one sort or another which it cannot overcome”.

One of the writers who accepted this theory was Louis B. Boudin author of “THE THEORETICAL SYSTEM OF KARL MARX” and “SOCIALISM AND WAR” (Grossmann’s book quotes from Boudin but described him as A. Boudin). Paul Mattick also accepted the theory.

Boudin, in his “SOCIALISM AND WAR” (New York New Review Publishing Association) summarised the theory in Chapter II. He held that: *“the working class produces not only more than it consumes but more than society as a whole consumes”* and that developed capitalism can only get rid of this surplus while there remain areas: *“in a lower order of capitalist development”*, which included not only foreign undeveloped countries but also backward agricultural areas in the country.

But, said Boudin, this situation (i.e. as it existed in 1914 when Boudin gave the lectures incorporated in the book) cannot last: *“for soon there are more countries producing a surplus than there are countries in a condition to absorb it”* (page 68). Then breakdown or collapse has to take place.

Over eighty years have passed since Grossmann set out his elaborate theory and the collapse still hasn’t happened.

Kennedy writes (page 1)-

“The survival of capitalism over the past century is widely held to be the most damning refutation of Marxism. The popular view is that Marx’s predication that the capitalist system was destined to collapse under the weight of its internal contradictions has been falsified by events”.

Kennedy won’t have this. He argues that the abandonment of Marx by those he describes as the “Left” is premature.

He says (page 2) that the world capitalist recession of the 1990’s has turned into a slump and confounded all the confident promises of an early return to stable and sustained growth.

The first comment called for on this is that it wasn’t Marx who took the line of waiting for capitalism to collapse but Grossmann, Boudin and the rest.

Apart from some occasional confused statements made by Engels after Marx’s death, Marx and Engels took the positive line that capitalism could survive its periodical depressions and that the only way to get rid of capitalism is for a Socialist working class to take positive action to bring it about through the capture of the machinery of

government.

In the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO Marx and Engels did not say that Capitalism will destroy itself but that: “*what the bourgeoisie produces...are its own gravediggers*” –the working class.

And Kennedy does not take note of the fact that in the 1930’s when “*a collapse of capitalism*” was being much discussed; being preached by the Communists and feared by many capitalists and capitalist politicians, and when Herman Cahn’s book “COLLAPSE OF CAPITALISM” was widely read, there was one Marxist organisation, the Socialist party of Great Britain, which stood out against the tidal wave with the publication in 1932 of “WHY CAPITALISM WILL NOT COLLAPSE”.

It was received with disbelief and some derision but events proved that our case, based on Marx, was correct. There is no overall shortage of purchasing power and a blind revolt of the unemployed does not offer a way to Socialism. Workers, who vote for capitalist parties, as of course the great majority still do, and who lose their jobs, are not thereby converted into Socialists. The unemployed workers who demonstrate or riot are looking for capitalists to employ them and demanding that the government get capitalism expanding again. They are not setting out to establish Socialism.

Grossmann and Kennedy have something else to answer for –Grossmann was a supporter of the Stalinist capitalist dictatorship and Kennedy writes (page 2) of “*the transition from Stalinism to capitalism in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China*”.

Stalinism and Russia under Stalin’s successors was capitalism; state capitalism. Its collapse is not the collapse of “*Socialism*” but shows the inability of Russian State Capitalism with its huge paralysing bureaucracy to keep up with the greater industrial efficiency of western market capitalism.

Here again it was the Socialist Party of Great Britain which was correct when all the bogus Marxists were wrong. When Lenin and his associates seized power in 1917 and established their dictatorship it was the Socialist party of Great Britain which at once rejected the claim that Russia was “*Socialist*” (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and denied the possibility of establishing Socialism until the slow task of winning over the workers to an understanding and acceptance of Socialism had been achieved.

It is claimed that the new edition of Grossmann’s book that it is a valuable contribution to Marxist theory. It may serve as a subject of argument among those, whose idea of Socialism is to wait for capitalism to collapse, but it has no value as an aid to the understanding of Marx’s economics and of the steps a Socialist working class must take to establish Socialism.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

According to the so-called Clapham based Socialist Party we were expelled because we refused to obey a Conference Resolution which stated that all propaganda must be carried out in the name of the Socialist Party and that the name S.P.G.B. must never be used. It was obviously a resolution that can be ignored by some. The Camden Branch (Formerly Central London) now advertise their meetings in the following manner. The adverts appeared in TIME OUT magazine.

CAMDEN SOCIALISTS.

Public Meeting etc...and for Sunday 29th November their advert ran as follows: “*The DIGGERS: THE REAL ENGLISH REVOLUTIONARIES. With guest speaker Adam Buick for the Camden Socialist Party*” It's nice to know that their General Secretary is now a guest speaker for his own Party, although it was a definite move to try and pass themselves off as something other than the Socialist Party.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS.

An item for discussion at their Delegate Meeting was: "*The Third World and its implications for the Socialist Movement*". One delegate from Lancaster made the following contribution: "...Also many of these countries were dictatorships which hampered people fighting back in the way they could in this country; it was in our interest to help them in this; that is why she was still in Amnesty International which was doing a good job here".

THE SOCIALIST PARTY ON SELLING LITERATURE

One delegate on the item: "THE RISE OF NEO-FASCISM IN EUROPE" said: "...we should say to workers being harassed by racist thugs, that they should organise to protect themselves. He would even be prepared to go so far, if he met a BNF seller outside a tube station, to ask if he repudiated racist attacks and if he didn't to try to prevent him selling". This is just the kind of tactics used by Left-Wing and Fascist groups.

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Spanner & The SPGB

In No. 6 issue of socialist studies we published an article entitled "*Challenge to the Anarcho Socialist Party*" in which the following statement appeared:

"The Clapham Party subsequently organised a weekend school for 4th July 1992 on the subject of "Libertarian Socialism", another name for anarchism. The organisers of the school are members of the Spanner group of anarchists who are also members of the Clapham Party".

In response to this brief and factual statement we have received a letter from Mr. Cox who, in addition to being a member of the Clapham Party, is a joint editor of Spanner. This letter consists of 1700 words and is too long for publication apart from its contents which are largely beside the point of the issues raised in the original article. However, we shall deal with those of Mr Cox's comments which are relevant to our case.

Mr. R. Cox describes the above quoted statement as "*a ridiculous travesty of the truth*". He claims that Spanner is not an organisation; it has no members and is entirely produced by a small number of people. R. Cox does not deny he is a member of the Clapham Party and that the journal contains contributions by members of the Party; nor does he deny that **Spanner** is an anarchist journal. And also that the Clapham Party organised a Summer School on Libertarian Socialism. Nowhere did we refer to **Spanner** as an organisation. Mr. Cox protests too much.

In his letter he say that "*Spanner has a particularly focus –opposition to the market and the state*" (page 1). Also that "*anarchism is after all the proposition that there should be no government. I have always understood anarchism to be a society without government*" (page 2). Here R. Cox is telling us that socialism and anarchism have something in common; i.e. anti-market –anti-state. This is incorrect. R. Cox, Spanner and the Clapham Socialist Party, together with all anarchists and other reformers and not socialists are opposed to certain feature of capitalism, including hostility to the State, the monetary system, and the market economy, but that does not make them socialists. Socialism cannot be separated from the means to achieve it. It is precisely these political means to obtain socialism which remove it from the Utopian idealists, liberals, humanists, anarchists and moralists who regard socialism as a desirable philosophical ideal divorced from conscious political action.

We hold that a socialist working class can establish socialism by getting political power through the use of the vote and that can use that political power to dispossess the capitalists and reorganise society. What's more they can do this immediately. Mr. Cox, Spanner, the Clapham Socialist party and their anarchist friends do not accept this position. Mr. Cox and Spanner say they do not reject it either. This is rank dishonesty. Mr. Cox signifies his

agreement with the Principles of the S.P.G.B. which state more particularly the political action the workers must take. Other members of that Party signed to these principles also, but totally ignore them in practice.

In the Anarchist Year book for 1993 there is an entry for **Spanner**. The objective of the magazine is clearly stated in political terms: "*It rejects both reformism and millenarianism, millenarian propagandism, favouring instead revolutionary gradualism as the most practical alternative*". He confirms this in his letter (page 2). Why does R. Cox use this obscure jargon? We suspect that he wants to hide the real meaning behind these woolly phrases. Reduced to simple English, the Big bang theory or millenarian theory R. Cox rejects holds that capitalism will be abolished and socialism established when the working class gain political power. Mr R. Cox rejects and **Spanner** reject this explicitly. In short, Mr. Cox, in common with other anarchists does not accept the social revolution will be achieved with the conquest of political power by the working class. It is abundantly clear that Mr. Cox does not understand anything about the class struggle or the theory of social development.

Mr. Cox's alternative is the old theory of revolutionary gradualism... The Fabian society put forward the same idea in the 19th century and they called it the inevitability of gradualism. Its proclaimed object was Socialism. The Fabian Society at least put forward a number of practical and achievable reforms. **Spanner's** revolutionary gradualism is totally removed from the facts of social life. If it means anything it means revolution by stages. **Spanner's** proposals include stripping the capitalist of his power and property gradually. As the workers become more revolutionary, so runs the theory, they will make greater demands on the capitalists, they will withdraw from undefined areas of production, form communes and co-operatives which will be self-provisioning or self-supporting (How are propertyless workers to obtain the means to become self-supporting?). This will undermine the power of the State and the capitalist economy by these workers withdrawing from commodity production. The state will be forced to grant a massive increase in free services in order to bribe or buy off the growing socialist movement.

This Alice in wonderland scenario rests on several untenable assumptions:

1. That the capitalist system has the capacity to buy off the workers through the introduction of massive reforms.
2. That there is a significant growth in the socialist movement.

and

3. That the capitalists will allow their property and power to be gradually undermined without doing anything about it. The fact that the capitalists have control of the political machinery and will use it to protect their property appears to have been overlooked. Spanner argues that the significant contraction in capitalist economic relations together with a progressive undermining of the authority of the state, both capitalism and the State will wither away before the establishment of Socialism. This is a variation on the collapse of capitalism theory. Obviously if there is no State there is no machinery of government, therefore political action by the workers would be superfluous.

It is a pity that we have to inject a touch of realism into this beautiful vision. To begin with, we do not have a strong socialist movement. We have had 4 general elections in the last 10 years and workers in their millions have voted solidly for capitalism. Workers have indeed withdrawn from production; over 3 million of them through unemployment. This has not weakened capitalism; it has reduced the standard of living of those workers.

A strong socialist movement is only possible when the working class are able to grasp the fact that they are potentially the real power in society and have the means to change society immediately and decisively. Why should the working class accept bribes or reforms to defer the revolution? Why should the working class accept bribes or reforms to defer the revolution? Why should they withdraw from production when they can take over the means of production? Why should they become hermits within co-operatives or communes? Why should they delay the introduction of socialism by battering with the capitalist class when they can rid of them?

A strong socialist movement which would represent the most useful and intelligent section of society would reject with contempt and derision any suggestion that they should delay the establishment of socialism in order to accommodate the capitalists. They would get on with the business of revolution.

The Socialist Party Refuses to Debate

The S.P.G. B. challenged the Clapham based Socialist Party to debate during the summer of 1992. The response of the Socialist Party was to question the credentials of the S.P.G.B. General Secretary by asking what authority he had. On being informed that the General Secretary had been appointed by a meeting of S.P.G.B members the following reply was received signed by Mr. Buick on the instructions of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party.

“Your claim to have been elected General Secretary of the SPGB is absurd and not to be taken seriously. The general Secretary, together with the EC and other Party officers are elected annually by a vote of all members of the SPGB. At the time of the most recent election for General Secretary you and the other members of the Ashbourne Court group were expelled from the SPGB on the grounds of your persistently undemocratic conduct.

“There is one political party which is the SPGB. At no time was any decision taken to change the Party’s name. In fact, a Party Poll to change our official name was lost in 1986 (even had it been carried and their Party had adopted the title World Socialist Party, as some of our companion parties, this would in no way have meant that we would have ceased to stand for socialism). The SPGB voted to abbreviate its name for propaganda purposes to The Socialist Party. Those members of the Ashbourne Court group who were in the SPGB voted against this decision, but that was the decision of the majority. We assume that if a minority of the Ashbourne Court Group oppose the election of C. May as their Secretary they will be at liberty to appoint their own secretary and proclaim that they, the minority, are the Ashbourne Court Group. Such anti-democratic behaviour has no place in the SPGB and that was why it was necessary to expel a small number of members including C. May.

The Ashbourne Court group’s claim to be the SPGB is invalid and dishonest. They contend that by abbreviating our Party’s name on some occasions (a relatively trivial matter) we no longer stand for Socialism. In fact, the SPGB’s election manifesto in January 1910 was headed MANIFESTO OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY. This is no more meant that it was inconsistent with the Object and Principles of the SPGB than it would do for someone to suggest that Cyril May is no longer Cyril May when he refers to himself as Cyril.

The fact is that the Ashbourne Court group comprises a handful of embittered expelled members of the SPGB, wounded by the refusal of socialists to permit them to act undemocratically and doing everything in their power to disrupt the principled and honest work for socialism being carried out by the SPGB. Should they decide to form a political party which does not usurp our name and which declares clearly its political case, including that concerning the principle of democratic behaviour, we would be pleased to consider debating with them. As a group of political disrupters and spoilers, more interested in damaging the efforts of socialists than stating anything positive, they will be treated with the contempt they deserve and ignored by the SPGB”.

REPLY

We thank Mr. Buick and his Executive Committee (E.C.) for his lesson in democratic procedure and we note that this was the smokescreen behind which he and his party hide from open debate. We will not chase all the hares that Mr. Buick has put up here but let us nail this principle of democratic behaviour on the head. The heinous undemocratic crime for which members were expelled from the Socialist Party was to use “*Socialist Party of Great Britain*” in adverts and at meetings. On joining the Clapham Party (certainly up to 1991) all applicants had to sign a “*Form A*” signifying their acceptance of the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. That is 100% of the Clapham membership. Now Clause 8 of the Principles state: “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore enters the field of political action...*”. It does not say “*Socialist Party*” or “*The world Socialist Party*” or “*Camden Socialists*” but “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*”. All the membership had signed their name to this, a full one hundred per cent of the members. This is straightforward and democratic enough. It was quite clear what the name of the party was. Then for its own reasons, the 1988 Conference passed a resolution, confirmed by Party Poll in 1991, that both keeps the old name and changes it to “*The Socialist Party*”. The important part of the 1988 resolution however is the part

which states under what conditions “*The Socialist Party*” is to be used:

- 1). On the cover of the socialist standard, pamphlets and leaflets.
- 2). Generally in the texts of articles and pamphlets.
- 3). On all occasions where the address of Head office is given, e.g. headed notepaper, adverts for socialist material etc...
- 4). All advertising and publicity material, posters, media adverts etc.
- 5). In the titles of meetings and debates and as the organiser of them.
- 6). Generally by speakers at indoor and outdoor meetings
- 7). Manifestoes, election addresses etc...

Any sensible interpretation of this would conclude that this was indeed a “*decision taken to change the Party’s name*”.

This Conference decision was to be “*strictly upheld*”. It had thus effectively changed the name of the party on the political field; it had expunged “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*” from political activity. So we have a Conference and Party Poll decision which conflicts with the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. Whilst 100% of the members wanted the S.P.G.B. to be on the political field when they joined, apparently a majority of those voting (but not a majority of the Party) now wanted “*The Socialist Party*” to enter the political field. In other words the majority of those voting had changed their minds and no longer agreed with the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. They wanted to force their change of mind on the others.

The members, who were expelled from the Socialist Party in May 1991 without charge, reconstituted the S.P.G.B. on 11th June 1991. The “*anti-democratic behaviour*” for which they were expelled consisted in using the name “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*” in leaflets and at meetings as required by the Principles. It is completely untrue to say that these members would not use any abbreviations, but the full name was always spelled out at some point to make our political identity clear.

The fact is most workers seeing a meeting organised by “*The Socialist Party*” would think it was run by the Labour Party. The abbreviation “*for propaganda purposes*” ... “*a relatively trivial matter*” was to be “*strictly upheld*” and of course the intention was to obliterate the S.P.G.B. and its history from the political field. Clearly the abbreviation was not “*trivial*” enough to stop two Branches from being expelled from the party without charge. The Branches were expelled for using “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*” which had been banned by the 1988 Conference and 1991 Party Poll. The socialist Party’s letter shows all the hallmarks of creating a diversion to obscure the fact that they are refusing to debate with us.

But we must point out to Mr. Buick and his E.C. that under the authority of the above Conference and Party Poll decision with which they agree, his Party is **obliged** to debate under the name “*The Socialist Party*”. So where can be the objection to our using “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*”, a name and history of which we are justly proud and which is inseparably linked with the principles? After all a majority of the Clapham based Socialist Party’s members who voted decided that they did not want “*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*” to enter the political arena. We suspect that these Clapham members would be very happy to see the S.P.G.B. and its history disappear altogether, so that they can get on with, to them, more pressing or fashionable issues, such as homosexuality, women’s liberation, moralising about the market, abolishing the State, encouraging workers to confront the armed forces of the state in the name of democracy; anything but putting a clear case for Socialism.

It is interesting to note that the Clapham based Socialist Party only takes its Conference resolutions seriously when it comes to expelling sound Socialists. They frequently write letters on S.P.G.B. headed notepaper (forbidden under their own resolution); Mr. Buick himself has been seen at least twice in Hyde Park on an “*S.P.G.B.*” platform,

Camden Branch of the Socialist Party now run meetings in the name of “*Camden Socialists*”, the Islington Branch has run at least one meeting described in the local newspaper as organised by the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Will these members too be expelled for such “*persistent undemocratic conduct*”? We rather doubt it; after all it is such a “*trivial matter*”.

The political case of The Socialist Party of Great Britain as reconstituted in 1991 is clear: it stands for Socialism and nothing but and is committed to carrying out its propaganda in line with the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES drawn up by the S.P.G.B. in 1904. We have no need to disrupt Mr. Buick’s Party; his own members are quite capable of doing that themselves. We do not behave in that way unlike some Socialist Party members (see SOCIALIST STUDIES NO 6). In explaining the continuing existence of the S.P.G.B. it has been necessary to explain the circumstances leading to the re-constitution of the S.P.G.B. If, in doing so, we have frequently drawn attention to the errors and hypocrisy of The Socialist Party then we can only say that it has been a necessary part of the process. The conspiracy of silence in the SOCIALIST STANDARD and from the Socialist Party in general suggests that they would like the whole thing swept under the carpet and forgotten. But the S.P.G.B. is here to stay and will put the case for Socialism and outlast those who wish to destroy it. The challenge to debate is still there. It will not be our members who will be the “*spoilers*”, we can promise that.

SOCIALISM & DEMOCRACY

Socialism can only be democratic. At one time Socialism was known also as “*social democracy*”, a phrase which shows well that democratic control would extend to all aspects of social affairs, including the production and distribution of wealth. There is an old socialist slogan which speaks of “*government over people*” giving way to “*the administration of things*”; meaning that the public power of coercion and the government which operates it, will have no place in Socialism. The state, which is an organisation composed of soldiers, policemen, judges and gaolers charged with enforcing the laws, is only needed in class society for in such societies there is no community of interest, only class conflict. The purpose of government is to maintain law and order in the interest of the dominant class. It is in fact an instrument of class oppression. In Socialism there will be no classes and no built-in class conflicts: everybody will have the same basic social interest. There will be genuine social harmony and community interest. In these circumstances there is no need for any coercive machine to govern or rule over the people. The phrase “*socialist government*” is a contradiction in terms. Where there is socialism there is no government and where there is government there is no Socialism.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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